

## Student Knowledge and Perceptions of Individual Transition Planning and its Process

by Kendra L. Williams-Diehm and Patricia S. Lynch, Texas A&M University

### Abstract

*Although increased attention in special education has been given to individual transition planning, little research has been done to assess student opinions and knowledge on this process. The majority of research has focused on “best practice” to ensure quality transition planning for students. This study surveyed 103 students receiving special education services at a large high school in Texas to assess student knowledge and perceptions on the current transition planning process. Students surveyed represent those with mild to moderate disabling conditions (intellectual disability, learning disability, emotional disturbance, autism, speech, and other health impairment) and were educated in a spectrum of general education and special education classrooms. Results are discussed in terms of how the students in special education have been educated on the transition process, how the special education staff used student goals and desires in writing transition plans, and overall student perceptions of the process.*

### History of Transition Planning

Education planning for individuals with disabilities has undergone radical changes since the creation of PL 94-142, the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) in 1975, which first mandated a free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities. This law was significantly updated in 1990 when PL 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted. Some of the changes included the provision of medical services, specialized transportation, related services, and the mandate for transition services. Even more recently, the Amendments to IDEA, both in 1997 and 2004, require a transition plan by age 16. This individualized transition plan requires participation from the student and the establishment of linkages to adult service providers in order to facilitate the transition process and help assure against a gap in services upon exiting high school. Congress provided clear guidance to the delivery of transition services in the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004:

The term ‘transition services’ means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—  
(A) is designed to be a *results-oriented process*, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability *to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities*, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult

services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the individual child’s needs, *taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests...*” (Section 1401)

More recently, with the passing of Indicator 14 of the State Performance Plan on Effective Transition, school districts are now being held accountable for the post-secondary success of students served through special education (Post-School Outcome Center, 2005). The transition plan is critical in outlining and preparing for this success.

In general, past research has shown that students with disabilities achieve post-school outcomes at a much lower rate than do their non-disabled peers (Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Sittleton, & Frank, 1990). This spans across the four main categories of post-secondary outcomes, which include employment, post-secondary education, independent living, and community integration (National Transition Network, 1997; Wagner et al., 1991). Another study found fewer than half of students with disabilities were employed full time two years following their high school graduation (Wagner, et al, 1991). In addition, Blackorby and Wagner (1996) found that African-American and Hispanic students with disabilities earned less in wages and had even more difficulty finding employment when compared to Anglo students with disabilities.

Less favorable outcomes occurred in studies of post-secondary education and students with disabilities. Students with learning disabilities often make inappropriate career decisions because they do not realize how

their own personal interests and characteristics fit into the career decision profile (Jagger, Neukrug, & McAuliffe, 1992). The original National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) concluded that only 22.5% of students with disabilities access post-secondary education compared with 56% of the general population (Wagner et al., 1991). However, more recent research shows improvements in that 31% of students with disabilities access post-secondary education within two years of leaving high school (Newman, 2005).

As part of transition-focused research in the past decade, different strategies were considered to determine how to maximize benefits to students with disabilities. These specific strategies are now critical in ensuring optimal results for transition planning. One of the most promising is the use of self-determination and maximizing student-centered planning.

### ***Student-Centered Planning through Self-Determination***

For best practice in transition planning, the focus must remain on the student, keeping the personal goals of the student in mind, as indicated in IDEA 2004. Including the student in all decision-making required in transition planning enables his or her plan to be more meaningful (Wehmeyer, 1998). In fact Thoma (1997) found that a student who implemented his or her own transition plan achieved a higher employment rate after high school and experienced a more independent living setting away from parental homes. Self-determination is defined as being the primary agent who makes decisions and causes things to happen in one's life (Wehmeyer, 1997). In terms of self-determination, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) concluded that adults who expressed higher self-determination achieved

higher post-secondary outcomes than individuals with lower skills in self-determination.

In recent years, self-advocacy and self-determination have been used to help foster students' participation in student-centered planning. Past research clearly shows that students who have been shown self-determination skills speak up more during transition planning meetings than students who have not been taught self-determination strategies (Wehmeyer, 1997). However, learning the aspects of self-determined behavior takes time. These skills must be taught gradually, starting at a young age. As the student matures, greater responsibility and expectations may be placed on the student (Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Tramill, & Lattin, 1999). For instance, the student can attend the first transition planning meeting and offer input regarding transition goals. However, students should be leading the meeting and guiding all decisions by his or her senior year in high school. Several curricula have been developed based on research to teach students with disabilities self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Examples of these models are *Steps to Self-Determination* (Hoffman & Field, 2005), *Next S.T.E.P.S.* (Halpern, Herr, & Doren, 2000), and *Choicemaker* (Martin et al., 1996).

For student-centered planning to reach its full potential for developing student dreams and goals, students must learn to fully participate in transition planning process. Student involvement in education planning through Individualized Education Plans (IEP) is critical to develop decision-making and other self-determination skills (Martin, Huber Marshall, & DePry, 2001). Johnson et al. (2002) spoke to the importance of improving student atten-

dance at meetings in order to facilitate participation. It is important to note that student participation can occur through different forms. Participation may range from active, which includes leading one's own meeting, to limited, such as actively speaking during the meeting, to absent, which involves being present in the room but providing no information. One way to maximize active participation is to limit the number of participants in the meeting based on the student's desires. Finally, use careful consideration in inviting members to a meeting who are not strong supports for the student (Whitney-Thomas, Shaw, Honey, & Butterworth, 1998).

The field currently knows of the benefits to students to providing opportunities to increase self-determined behavior (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998) and in allowing students' active participation within their IEP meetings. In addition, research indicates that students are often unclear as to the purpose of educational planning meetings (Martin, Huber Marshall, & Sale, 2004). However, educators need to learn as much as possible in terms of what students know about transition planning so changes can be made within school programs. The purpose of this research is to determine what knowledge students have in terms of transition planning and how students perceive the role of school personnel in their transition planning.

## **Method**

### ***Setting***

The district studied was located in a mid-sized city in Texas. The district served one large high school, whose population mimics the city demographics. The ethnic makeup of the district was 39.9% Anglo, 34.8% Hispanic, 24.6% African Ameri-

can, and 0.7% other. This high school served 3,695 students and 15.4% of these students received special education services. In addition, 51% of the high school population was considered economically disadvantaged.

### *Instrumentation*

The participants completed a ten-question survey requesting student knowledge of and opinions of the transition planning process that was utilized at the high school. The survey was created based on best-practice research in transition planning and addressed the four areas of employment, post-secondary education, independent living, and community integration (National Transition Network, 1997; Wagner et al., 1991). In order to ensure valid results from the survey, the items were first reviewed by university faculty and then field tested by five students served in special education at the high school of interest.

After the administration of the field test, the language of the survey was altered to avoid technical education language, and the format was changed to include a different likert scaling. The resulting survey consisted of the following breakdown. The first two questions of the survey dealt with the purpose and timing of transition planning. The third question was divided into four sub-parts dealing with mandatory information on the transition plan. This specifically asked the students their desires for (1) employment, (2) post-secondary education, (3) independent living, and (4) recreation and leisure. Questions four through nine included likert-scaled items placed on a four-point scale ranging from disagreeing strongly to agreeing strongly. These questions addressed students' comfort levels with the transition process, adult service providers, parental input, and their overall opin-

ion regarding how the school had prepared students in terms of their transition plan and the future. Question ten allowed for an open response in which students could provide feedback for professionals.

### *Procedure*

A list of all students receiving special education services was obtained through the high school special education coordinator. Non-verbal students, students with insufficient verbal skills, students with severe multiple disabilities, and those students surveyed in the field test were eliminated from the survey pool. Later, students whose primary disabling condition was auditory impairment were eliminated due to translation and interpretation consistency between English and American Sign Language. One hundred names were chosen at random to comprise the study sample.

The survey took roughly five minutes to administer verbally with students. The researcher interviewed students individually to allow for the same feedback and clarification to be given to all students if questions arose during the survey administration. All questions were read and the researcher recorded answers to try to eliminate non-response and error due to students not being able to answer the questions. The greatest problem during survey administration was the inability to locate students for the following reasons: (a) students were placed in alternative settings, (b) students were truant, and (c) students were absent due to illness. If after three attempts to locate a student on different days and through different courses proved unsuccessful, a new name was randomly chosen from the original list of students. An additional 24 students were chosen to achieve the sample size of 100. However

due to students returning from alternative placements and to illness during the administration of the survey, a total of 103 students were surveyed. After all surveys were completed, the names were listed numerically based on the order drawn. Every ninth student was selected to compare the student's actual transition plan to the student's survey responses. A total of 11 plans were analyzed. If a student's transition plan was not able to be located, the next number on the list was selected.

Table 1 indicates the gender, ethnicity, grade level distribution, and primary disabling condition categories of the sample students surveyed. Tables 2 and 3 compare the survey sample distribution to the actual school special education population percentages. In terms of ethnicity and grade-level, the survey sampled a higher percentage of Hispanic students (38% vs. 34%) and twelfth-grade students when compared to the same population (18.5% vs. 15.8%) than were represented in the school special education population. The survey sampled a lower percentage of Anglo students than were found in the special education population (22% vs. 25%). However, for gender, African-American student, and grade levels 9-11, the survey sampled numbers reflective of the special education population. In terms of disability categories, the survey sampled six out of the eleven disabling condition represented at the high school. The unrepresented populations had fewer than three students served under that disabling condition within the school, with the exception of auditory impairment.

### **Survey Question Results and Discussions**

Results of the survey are presented below according to questions asked. Also included are

the discussions specific to the individual survey items.

**QUESTION 1: THE DATE OF MY LAST TRANSITION PLANNING MEETING WAS....**

An overwhelming 83.5% of the students surveyed could not respond to this item. Thirteen students asked the interviewer if this was part of the annual IEP meeting. The interviewer responded to this question stating that transition planning is required for all students ages 16 and up and may have been part of the IEP. Eleven of these students then responded with a question asking whether the transition planning meeting was done at the same time as the annual IEP meeting. The interviewer replied telling students that the transition planning meeting may have occurred at the same time as the IEP meeting. These 11 students all knew the date for the transition planning meeting based on their recollections of the annual IEP meeting. Only six (5.8%) students or knew the date of their transition planning meeting without asking about

the annual IEP meeting. Responses were coded as knowing the answer to this question if the student provided the correct month of his/her last transition planning meeting.

**QUESTION 2: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A TRANSITION PLAN?**

Only 10.7% of the students interviewed knew the purpose of a transition plan. A typical response was "a plan talking about what I am doing after high school" or "the paper stating I am going to a post-secondary school to study a particular field." An additional 13.4% of the students surveyed attempted to answer the question, but with an incorrect answer. All of the incorrect answers related to items found in an annual IEP meeting, such as progress made in courses, schedules for the upcoming year, and discipline concerns. Unfortunately, 74.9% of the students stated they did not know the purpose of a transition plan and did not attempt to answer the question.

When considering both questions 1 and 2 simulta-

neously, only three students knew both the date of and purpose of their transition plan, while 74.8% of the students did not know the answer to either question. These results indicate that students at this high school were generally uninformed about the transition process. As a whole, these students did not appear to differentiate between their annual IEP meeting and their transition plan. In addition, the students did not appear to understand the planning importance that the transition plan established.

**QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL GOALS FOR YOUR TRANSITION PLAN IN THE AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, INDEPENDENT LIVING, AND RECREATION/LEISURE?**

Question 3 targeted students' interests and preferences for their individual transition plan and then compared these answers to the actual transition plan to ensure student desires were being recorded. The actual number of transition plans examined was only 10% of the sampled population. If the student response matched the written goal on the transition plan, a score of one was given; if the student response did not match the transition plan goal, a score of two was given. While searching for the original 11 transition plans, six documents could not be located. Therefore the next student on the list was selected. The documents examined were written two to ten months prior to the survey being administered.

**EMPLOYMENT GOALS**

Approximately half (54.5%) of the transition plans described the career choice of the student. For instance, the transition plan stated a specific field or career interest such as nursing. Another 18% of the transition planning documents provided vague responses such as the student would obtain a job with no specific career aspirations

Table 1

Descriptive Summary of Surveyed Students by Gender, Ethnicity, and Grade Level

| Demographic Category    | N  | Percentage |
|-------------------------|----|------------|
| Gender                  |    |            |
| Male                    | 62 | 60.2%      |
| Female                  | 41 | 39.8%      |
| Ethnicity               |    |            |
| African-American        | 41 | 39.8%      |
| Anglo                   | 23 | 22.3%      |
| Hispanic                | 39 | 37.9%      |
| Grade Level             |    |            |
| Ninth Grade             | 47 | 45.6%      |
| Tenth Grade             | 23 | 22.3%      |
| Eleventh Grade          | 14 | 13.6%      |
| Twelfth Grade           | 19 | 18.5%      |
| Disability Category     |    |            |
| Other health impairment | 2  | 1.9%       |
| Intellectual Disability | 9  | 8.7%       |
| Emotional Disturbance   | 7  | 6.8%       |
| Learning Disability     | 82 | 79.6%      |
| Speech Impairment       | 1  | 1%         |
| Autism/PDD              | 2  | 1.9%       |

**Table 2**  
Comparison between the High School Special Education Population and Sample for Gender, Ethnicity, and Grade Level

| Demographic Category | Special Education Population | Special Education Sample |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Gender               |                              |                          |
| Male                 | 61%                          | 60.2%                    |
| Female               | 39%                          | 39.8%                    |
| Ethnicity            |                              |                          |
| African-American     | 40.7%                        | 39.8%                    |
| Anglo                | 25.4%                        | 22.3%                    |
| Hispanic             | 33.9%                        | 37.9%                    |
| Grade Level          |                              |                          |
| Ninth Grade          | 47.5%                        | 45.6%                    |
| Tenth Grade          | 22.5%                        | 22.3%                    |
| Eleventh Grade       | 14.0%                        | 13.6%                    |
| Twelfth Grade        | 15.8%                        | 18.5%                    |

**Table 3**  
Comparison between the High School Special Education Population and Sample for Disability Category

| Disability Category     | Special Education Population | Special Education Sample |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Other Health Impairment | 4.3%                         | 1.9%                     |
| Mental Retardation      | 8.0%                         | 8.7%                     |
| Emotional Disturbance   | 5.1%                         | 6.8%                     |
| Learning Disability     | 77.0%                        | 79.6%                    |
| Speech Impairment       | 0.5%                         | 1.0%                     |
| Autism/PPD              | 1.1%                         | 1.9%                     |

specified. Some discrepancy may be related to students choosing different career fields since their transition plans were written. However, vague responses about career choices are not in the spirit of transition planning.

#### POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION GOALS

During the interview process, some students provided very specific answers, such as naming a particular post-secondary school. This specific information was not required for a match between the actual transition plan and results from the student survey. A match occurred when the transition plan indicated the particular type of post-secondary institution reported by the student, such as four-year college, community

college, technical college, etc. The majority (81.8%) of the transition planning documents matched the student responses.

#### INDEPENDENT LIVING GOALS

Several students reported that they intended to live at home or in a college dormitory immediately after high school, but then move to an independent living arrangement. If the student reported both a short-term and long-term response, both answers were also expected on the actual transition plan. Only 45.5% of the student responses matched the transition planning document. Many documents indicated the student would live independently with no other information provided, such as a time frame.

#### RECREATION AND LEISURE GOALS

When reporting on these goals, students were expected to name a form of recreation other than "hanging out with friends." Some typical answers included swimming, playing basketball, dancing, sewing, etc. However, only 36% of the actual transition planning documents examined listed any specific recreational/leisure activities. The remaining 63.6% listed vague responses such as, "independent" or "does activity on own".

Overall, 55% of the transition plan indicators matched student responses, while 45% did not. Table 4 depicts this information in greater detail. As mentioned above, while some discrepancy might be attributed to students changing their choices, 34% of the items examined on the actual transition plans had such a vague response that the interest of the student could not be determined.

**QUESTION 4: I BELIEVE MY INPUT WAS VALUED IN WRITING MY TRANSITION PLAN.** When asking students about this statement, it was always followed with the sub-question "Do you feel your teachers listened to what you wanted before writing your transition plan?" This comment helped clarify concern or confusion for the student.

Most students agreed that their input was valued in writing the transition planning document. The mean response was 2.76 with a standard deviation of 0.45. Table 5 provides the numerical breakdown of the responses. The results indicate that the majority of students felt that teachers listened to them. It is interesting to note that no student strongly agreed with the question.

**QUESTION 5: I ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN MY TRANSITION PLANNING MEETING.** This statement was further clarified, if necessary, by asking students if they spoke during their transition planning

meeting as opposed to allowing the teacher do all the speaking. Most students again agreed with the statement; the average score was 2.64 with a standard deviation of 0.54. Table 5 provides a numerical breakdown of the student answers. Although 61.1% of the students reported that they spoke during their transition planning meetings, only 1.9% of the students actually led their transition planning meeting. It is important to note that 35.9% of the students never even spoke during their meeting. In addition, it is unclear what other forms of active participation, if any, occurred during transition meetings.

When considering questions 4 and 5 simultaneously, only 1% of students felt teachers always listened to them and 22% of students felt that teachers did not consider their preferences when writing the plan. A transition plan is based on student desires and dreams and all teachers should listen to student choice. Students need practice in advocating for themselves, and participating in discussions surrounding transition planning provides an excellent beginning. Unfortunately, only 1.9% of the surveyed students led their own transition planning meeting. Teachers need to encourage students to lead the discussion.

**QUESTION 6: I FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THE ADULT SERVICE PROVIDERS AND THEIR ROLES IN MY TRANSITION PROCESS.**

The most common response was "2," or disagree (n=70), with the average score being 2.2 with a standard deviation of 0.60 (See Table 5). A large number of students (72.8%) interviewed could not name an adult service provider on their own. Adult service providers play a critical role in the transition process and students must be educated about their roles. During this survey only 2.9% of the students knew the purpose of an adult service provider. This may indicate a lack of student preparation and instruction on the types and purposes of adult service providers. This may indicate a major deficiency in the current transition program. In order for students to receive maximum benefits from adult service providers, they must first understand who the adult service providers are and the services provided; 97% of the students could not do this.

**QUESTION 7: I FEEL THAT MY PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S) WERE CONSULTED IN THE TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS AND THEIR INPUT WAS VALUED.**

Table 5 includes response data to item seven. The most frequent response was "3" indicating agreement with the average response being 2.8 with a standard deviation of 0.42. It was found that 81.6% of the parents were in attendance at the tran-

sition planning meeting, according to the students. Only 1.9% of the students felt his/her parents were contacted prior to the meeting. Both of the students who believed their parents were contacted prior to the meeting were students with intellectual disability. This possibly indicated that students with other disabilities, such as learning disabilities, did not feel their parents were consulted prior to the meeting.

This survey results indicate that the majority of parents received no communication from the teaching staff prior to the transition planning meeting. The vast majority, 98% reported no contact with parents in regards to transition planning and the families' dreams and desires prior to the meeting. This goes against the spirit of transition planning, where the law advocates for parent input.

**QUESTION 8: I HAVE MADE PROGRESS IN TEACHING MY TRANSITION GOALS.**

The purpose of this question was to see if students believed they were reaching their personal goals of working towards independence. The mode was 3 (n=77) which indicated students believed they were making some progress. The average score was 2.8 with a standard deviation was 0.51. The majority, 79.6%, of students felt they were making progress towards their transition goals. Further

Table 4

Summary of Results for Employment, Post-Secondary Education, Independent Living, and Recreation and Leisure

| Post-secondary Outcome   | % Matched Transition Plan | % Non-matched Transition Plan | % Vague Responses |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Employment               | 54.5%                     | 45.5%                         | 18.2%             |
| Post-secondary Education | 81.8%                     | 18.2%                         | 18.2%             |
| Independent Living       | 45.5%                     | 54.5%                         | 45.5%             |
| Recreation and Leisure   | 36.4%                     | 63.6%                         | 63.6%             |

**Table 5**  
**Results to Questions 4 - 9**

| Response to Scale  | %<br>Answered |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Results to Question 4</b>   |               |
| Strongly agree: Teacher always respected student response (n=0)                          | 0%            |
| Agree: Teacher listened to student response (n=79)                                       | 77%           |
| Disagree: Teacher did not consider student response (n=23)                               | 22%           |
| Strongly disagree: Teacher did not ask for student response (n=1)                        | 1%            |
| <b>Results to Question 5</b>   |               |
| Strongly agree: Student lead the meeting (n=2)   | 2%            |
| Agree: Student present and spoke in meeting (n=63)                                       | 61%           |
| Disagree: Student present but did not speak in meeting (n=37)                            | 36%           |
| Strongly disagree: Student not present in meeting (n=1)                                  | 1%            |
| <b>Results to Question 6</b>   |               |
| Strongly agree: Student knew the name and purpose of adult service provider (n=3)        | 3%            |
| Agree: Student could name adult service provider (n=24)                                  | 23%           |
| Disagree: Student could not name adult service provider, recognized from list (n=70)     | 68%           |
| Strongly disagree: Student did not recognize adult service provider (n=6)                | 6%            |
| <b>Results to Question 7</b>   |               |
| Strongly agree: Student reported parent attendance & communication w/ teacher (n=2)      | 2%            |
| Agree: Student reported parents in attendance but little communication (n=82)            | 80%           |
| Disagree: Student reported parents not in attendance (n=19)                              | 18%           |
| Strongly disagree: Student felt school made no effort (n=0)                              | 0%            |
| <b>Results to Question 8</b>   |               |
| Strongly agree: Student felt a lot of progress was made (n=5)                            | 5%            |
| Agree: Student felt some progress was made (n=77)  | 75%           |
| Disagree: Student not sure if progress was made (n=20)                                   | 19%           |
| Strongly disagree: Student felt no progress was made (n=1)                               | 1%            |
| <b>Results to Question 9</b>   |               |
| Strongly agree: Student felt high school helped with post-secondary goals (n=5)          | 5%            |
| Agree: Student felt high school helped minimally with post-secondary goals (n=62)        | 60%           |
| Disagree: Student felt high school helped only in terms of graduation (n=29)             | 28%           |
| Strongly disagree: Student felt high school did not help with post-secondary goals (n=7) | 7%            |

details can be seen in Table 5.

**QUESTION 9: I BELIEVE THE CURRENT TRANSITION PROCESS AT MY HIGH SCHOOL HAS HELPED ME REACH MY TRANSITION GOALS.**

Although very similar to item 8, item 9 specifically asks students if the activities and instruction within their high school had helped students reach their transition goals. It is possible in the previous question that the progress made was not a direct result of the involvement from high school personnel. The mode response of 3 indicated that students felt the high school personnel minimally helped with post-secondary

goals (n=62); the average was 2.6 with a standard deviation of 0.69. Interestingly, 6.8% of the students felt that school personnel were absolutely not involved with helping them reach transition goals. It is also interesting to note that out of the 5 students who strongly agreed that school personnel were helping them, two were students in the cosmetology program which provided students with both instruction and preparation hours to take state cosmetology exams, one student was in the auto mechanic program which again provided students with skills necessary to take state licensure exams, and two had

received college scholarships based upon athletics. Table 5 shows the breakdown of responses.

The combined results seen across items 8 and 9 add additional insight to the results. Interestingly, 15% fewer students felt that high school personnel were helping them reach their transition goals than felt overall progress was being made. During the survey 80% of students reported they felt progress on their transition goals but only 65% reported that there were educators who helped them. This seems to indicate that many students are preparing for life after high school with little or no help from school personnel.

**QUESTION 10: I WOULD RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING TO IMPROVE THE TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS AT MY HIGH SCHOOL.**

This item allowed for open-ended responses for students to give feedback to the high school in terms of suggestions to help prepare future students. While only 17.5% (n=18) of the students chose to respond to this question, the answers were often very similar. Roughly 24% of the comments were related to discipline. The students felt teachers should be less strict on the students in terms of classroom procedures. Another 24% of the answers requested more vocational classes or that students be allowed in the vocational courses; the specific courses listed included auto mechanics, cosmetology, and welding. These courses had limited enrollment and therefore students were required to complete an application process and be selected to participate. Another common theme was that students reported that teachers tended to talk more and not genuinely listen to what students were requesting; Almost 30% of the students wanted teachers to really listen. The final 30% of the comments were requests for teachers to help and guide students into career choices. Students said that although teachers asked students their career ambitions, teachers did not give advice or guidance in helping students choose career fields by presenting different types of jobs.

### Limitations

Although roughly 18% of the students served through special education were surveyed, only 11% of the actual transition plans were examined. The results to question 3 were based upon roughly 2% of the students served through special education at the high school and a

great deal of variability could exist. In addition, this survey was based upon students who were present at school. No effort was made to find students who were truant or in alternative education placements, such as homebound or the juvenile detention center. Finally, although the percentages of individual students based on gender, ethnicity, grade level, and primary disability category were determined; the data was not analyzed based on these factors. It is possible that a great deal of variants may be found based upon these indicators. Unfortunately, socio-economic categories were not considered.

Another limitation of this study was that only student responses were collected. Additionally, student responses were based on their memory of transition/IEP meetings which could have occurred almost a year previously. Teachers were not interviewed and school policy was not examined regarding transition planning. This additional information could help better determine situations such as the amount of parental input solicited and whether or not information regarding adult service providers was supplied.

This study only interviewed students from one high school; therefore, it is just one sample of perceptions of high school students and is certainly not generalizable even to the state in which it occurred. However, looking at the perceptions of students in this high school may cause educators to wonder what the perceptions of their own students are and should encourage all to look at transition practices and make sure that students are well informed and involved in planning their transition from school to adult life.

### Summary and Recommendations

The transition process is critical to assuring the success of students served through special education services. In order to ensure this process is working, both the teachers and the students involved need to understand the purpose of transition planning and to be educated on best practice surrounding transition planning. The results of this study indicate that in this high school there were areas that needed improvement in the current transition process. The primary step in creating effective transition planning is to fully educate teachers on the transition process. Teachers must not only hear the legal requirements but also be convinced of its importance in predicting and guiding post-secondary success of the students. Teachers who do not understand transition planning are less effective in ensuring that the students receive the maximum benefits resulting from the transition plan. Teachers must also include the power of self-determination and respecting student choice for the student.

In addition to providing training in transition planning to high school teachers, administrators need to provide them with the time they need to work individually with students and their families in transition planning. Results of this study indicate that students want more guidance and assistance from their teachers, but often high school teachers have very large case loads and minimal time to devote to individual student counseling and individually meeting with families. Effective transition planning takes time, and that is a luxury many high school teachers do not have.

Additionally, a strong working relationship must be estab-

lished between the high school and the local adult service providers. Teachers must understand the importance of adult service providers and their role in the transition planning process and not see merely inviting the agencies as a legal requirement. Students and their families, if self-determination is truly a goal, also need to be better educated on adult agencies and the services they provide. Students in this high school were very lacking in information regarding adult agencies in their community. Students and families need to become acquainted with these agencies and to realize the importance of registering early and staying in touch with the adult service provider, especially when long waiting lists exist for many services.

The important factor to remember is that every student deserves to reach his or her maximum potential regardless of ability level. Schools should strive to provide every student with the support and services to help the child reach that level. Effective transition planning is one avenue to ensure this occurs.

## References

Blackorby, J., & Wagner, M. (1996). Longitudinal post-school outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the national longitudinal transition study. *Exceptional Children*, 62(5), 399-413.

Halpern, A.S., Herr, C.M. & Doren, B. (2000). *Next S.T.E.P.S.* Austin, TX: Pro-ed Inc.

Hoffman, A. & Field, S. (2005). *Steps to self-determination*. Austin, TX: Pro-ed Inc.

Jagger, L., Neukrug, E., & McAuliffe, G. (1992). Congruence between personality traits and chosen occupation as a predictor of job satisfaction for peoples with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 36, 53-60.

Johnson, D.R., Stodden, R.A., Emanuel, E.A., Luecking, R., & Mack, M. (2002). Current challenges facing the future of secondary education and transition services. What the research tell us. *Exceptional Children*, 68, 519-531.

Martin, J., Marshall, L.H., Maxson, L. Jerman, P., Miller, T. McGill, T. & Hughes, W. (1996). *Choicemaker curriculum*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Publishers.

Martin, J.E., Huber Marshall, L., & DePry, R.L. (2001). Participatory decision-making: Innovative practices that increase student self-determination. In R.W. Flexer, T.J. Simmons, P. Luft, & R.M. Baer (Eds.), *Transition planning for secondary students with disabilities* (pp. 304-332). Columbus OH: Merrill, Prentice Hall.

Martin, J.E., Huber Marshall, L., & Sale, P. (2004). A 3-year study of middle, junior high, and high school IEP meetings. *Exceptional Children*, 70, 285-297.

Mithaug, D.E., Horiuchi, C.N., & Fanning, P.N. (1985). A report on the Colorado statewide follow-up survey of special education students. *Exceptional Children*, 51, 397-404.

Morningstar, M.E., Kleinhammer-Tramel, P.J., & Lattin, D.L. (1999). Using successful models of student-centered transition planning and services for adolescents with disabilities. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 31(9), 1-19.

National Transition Network. (1997). *Transition requirements of IDEA*. (Policy Update). Minneapolis. MN: US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

Newman, L. (2005). Postsecondary education participation of youth with disabilities. In M. Wagner, L. Newman, R. Cameto, N. Garza, & P. Levine (2005), *After high school: A first look at the postschool experiences of youth with disabilities: A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study -2* (pp 4-1 – 4-16). Washington, DC: Office of Special Education Programs.

Post-School Outcomes Center (n.d.). Retrieved on December 28, 2005 from <http://www.psocenter.org/reporting.html>.

Sittlington, P.L., & Frank, A.R. (1990). Are adolescents with learning disabilities successfully crossing the bridge into adult life? *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 13(1), 97-111.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, P.L. 108-446, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.*

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, 20 U.S.C. 1400 (1997).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), PL 101-146, 20 U.S.C., 1401.

Thoma, C. (1997). *Self-determination in transition planning: Facilitating student choice for life*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., D'Amico, R., Jay, E.D., Butler-Nalin, P., Marder, C., & Cox, R. (1991). *Youth with disabilities: How are they doing? The first comprehensive report from the National Longitudinal transition study of special education students*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Wehmeyer, M. & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-determination and positive adult outcomes: A follow-up study of youth with mental retardation and learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 63(2), 245-255.

Wehmeyer, M. L. (1997). Self-determination as an education outcome: A definitional framework and implications for intervention. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 9, 175-209.

Wehmeyer, M. L. (1998). *Student involvement in transition-planning and transition-program implementation*. In Rusch, F., & Chadsey, J. G. (Eds.), *Beyond high school: Transition from school to work* (pp. 206-233), Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Wehmeyer, M.L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (1998). *Teaching self-determination to students with disabilities: Basic skills for successful transition*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Whitney-Thomas, J., Shaw, D., Honey, K., & Butterworth, J. (1998). Building a future: A study of student participation in person-centered planning. *The Journal of the Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 23(2), 119-133.

Correspondence about this manuscript may be sent to Kendra Williams-Diehm, Ph.D, 1200 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3136, Lawrence, KS 66045. Electronic mail may be sent to williams-diehm@ku.edu